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ABSTRACT

This study examined the success of narrative report cards, an alternative method of reporting student progress, at an elementary school in Virginia. Surveys about narrative reports were sent to parents of first and second graders, and two teachers at each grade level were interviewed about the reports. Results indicated that both parents and teachers preferred narrative reports to grades because they were more personal, less competitive, and conveyed more information to parents about their children's progress. A series of appendixes includes: (1) a list of alternatives to traditional grading reports; (2) a set of sample narrative report forms; (3) a copy of the parent survey used in the study; (4) results of the study presented in graph format; and (5) transcripts of the interviews with each of the four teachers. A list of nine references is included. (BC)

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DETERMINING THE SUCCESS OF NARRATIVE REPORT CARDS

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Running Head: Determining Success of Narratives

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ABSTRACT

Currently, many educators are expressing concern about the effects of grading on students and are switching to alternative methods of reporting on student's progress. This study was designed to investigate the success of narrative report cards, an alternative method of reporting. The research was conducted at one elementary school located in Central Virginia that uses narratives for Kindergarten, First, and Second Grades. Surveys were sent to parents to obtain their opinions about narratives. In addition, various teachers were interviewed on the subject. Results indicate that both parents and teachers prefer narratives to grades because of their more personal and less competitive nature.

Determining The Success Of Narrative Report Cards

Although grading is thoroughly entrenched in and identified with our educational system, it has not always been so. Grades first became evident in the late 19th Century and only at the high school level. Elementary teachers continued to write narrative reports for their students through the early Twentieth Century. Although grades became important early on in high school, they did not became prevalent in elementary school until much later. In actuality, grades have only been with us in the elementary school for a little over a half-century, and for almost all that time, their use has been surrounded by controversy. Over the past century, there have been cycles of support and nonsupport for grades. Through these debates, there has emerged clear-cut reasons for support of and opposition to grades. These same opinions still exist today and are still affecting the educational community.

If there has been so much controversy over grades, why are they still being used? One reason might be that grades offer "a traditional connection with basic fundamental education" (Miles, 1977). Many parents find grading a comfortable method of evaluation, since they remember receiving grades during their own schooling. They understand what it means when their child receives an A, a B, or an F in school. It is not just parents who feel comfortable with this system, though. Grading systems have been in elementary schools for many years now. Most humans tend to resist change and teachers and administrators are no

exception. To change to another method of evaluation would require large expenditures of time and effort, only those who feel very strongly about the grading system will pursue such a challenge. So although there has been a lot of debate over the years, schools still use grades as the predominant method of reporting on students.

The criticisms of grades first appeared when grades did and the same arguments persist today. I have delineated both positions in Table 1. The column on the left lists the position supported by those who believe grades are useful. On the right, I have listed the criticisms against grades as described by those who would like to see alternative methods of evaluation in the schools (Kirschenbaum, 1971).

TABLE 1

OPINIONS ON GRADES

Those who support grades	Those who oppose grades
1. traditional, back-to-basics	1. grades dehumanize students
2. grades motivate students	2. grades promote extrinsic motivation at the expense of intrinsic motivation
3. grades' competitive nature prepares students for real life	3. competitive nature of grades
4. method of comparing students	4. grades separate students into groups
5. students and parents like grades	5. grades adversely affect teaching methods
6. grades predict college and professional success	6. grades focus on one aspect of the student
7. useful for college admission	7. grades are a normative evaluation and do not document the progress of the individual

Those who support grades often do so for very traditional reasons. According to many supporters, grades offer a concrete method for comparing and ranking students, as well as determining where they stand. This is important in order to predict future success in both college and professional life, a major defense of grades. However, there is contrasting evidence that states grades do not predict future success. According to Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University, "many studies show little relationship between the grades students receive and their long-term success as adults" (Trotter, 1990). This statement may disprove that belief, but there are several other reasons why society clings to grading systems.

One such reason is that many believe grades are motivators for students and they will not work without them. In response to this idea, an interesting study was conducted by Ruth Butler and Mordica Nisan (Butler, 1986) in which they divided students into three groups and gave them an assignment. Group One received written comments on their performance, Group Two received numerical grades, and Group Three received no evaluation. After completing the assignment, the students were given an attitudinal survey to complete and the results showed that Group One, who received narrative evaluations, had a much higher level of interest and motivation than the other two groups. Furthermore, the students in Group Two expressed a lot of anxiety over their performance on the assignment. Although the pupils in Group Two worked hard, they held less interest in the assignment because

they were preoccupied with the grade they would receive. From these results, Butler and Nisan concluded that numerical grades foster extrinsic motivation at the expense of intrinsic. In relation to the belief that grades are motivators, the supporters of this are right. Grades are motivators, but extrinsically. That is why when you remove them initially, students may slack off. However, if grades are replaced by a more descriptive form of feedback, as suggested by this study, than intrinsic motivation will most likely occur.

Another idea is that students like to receive grades so they know how they are doing. In the same study conducted above, students were asked which kind of evaluation they would like to receive. Of those who received grades, 78.9% of the pupils stated that they would have preferred written comments, while 86.3% who received narratives were satisfied with the mode of evaluation used (Butler, 1986). From this, we can conclude that students do indeed like to receive feedback, but they would like it to be of a constructive nature. They do not want to be judged by a letter grade, but to be offered suggestions for improvement.

Many believe that grades have negative emotional effects on students (Kirschenbaum, 1971). It is this belief that causes the strongest opposition to grades and motivates many to voice their opinions. There are two main negative effects of grading that they oppose. First, grades promote competitiveness. Someone who supports grading will agree with that statement and then say that the competitive nature of the classroom prepares students

for real life. This was true in the early Twentieth Century when Darwinian thought was prevalent. However, it has become increasingly evident that in today's world a student will need more cooperation and group skills than competitive ones (National Governors' Association, 1986). For this reason, many suggest the elimination of grades from the classroom as one more way to decrease competition (Kirschenbaum, 1971).

On a similar line, the grading system has a tendency to divide students into superior and inferior groups. This is fine if you happen to be part of the superior group, but if you are a member of the inferior group, you may develop a negative image of yourself that may stay with you the rest of your life. This is what educators mean when they say that grades "dehumanize" children. As Sandra Folzer Napier puts it, "Grading implies a limiting process through which the individual is forced into some artificial category for the sake of efficiency" (cited in Bellanca & Simon, 1976). This may seem like a harsh statement, but if you think about Honor Rolls, ability grouping, and tracking, you will understand what she means.

Another argument against grades is that they only reflect one aspect of the child. Grades only reflect that the child can turn in homework and take tests. There is, or should be, more to education than that. As a form of normative evaluation, grades only reflect how the child competes with others. Many educators would rather see criterion-referenced evaluations that strictly depict the child's strengths and weaknesses. Even those outside

the field of education would like to see improvement here. In the Governors' Task Force on Education, they stated, "The nation- and the states and school districts - need better report cards about results, about what students know and can do" (National Governors' Association, 1986). This statement implies that they want a report card that will describe the students strengths and weaknesses in a fashion that truly depicts the whole child.

It is clear that there are many who are dissatisfied with the use of grades in elementary school. What alternatives do they suggest? There are many, but I will focus on the specific one that I have chosen to study, the narrative report card (for a listing of alternative reporting methods see Appendix A). The narrative report card is a written description of the student's progress for that grading period. Ideally, the teacher would name specific steps that the child has taken and also identify any areas for improvement. I have included examples of narratives written by some teachers in Albemarle County in Appendix B. This type of reporting can be very effective, since it is the "most personal, and reflects an intimate knowledge of the student" (Miles, 1977). Knowing the student well is important to both the parent and the student, and reflects upon good teaching.

For these very reasons, the county I am studying made the decision to switch to narrative report cards in their elementary schools. In 1988, the county decided to allow individual schools the option to choose between grades and narratives at the

elementary level. Each school can decide at which level to use them. Some prefer to use narratives all the way through elementary, while others would rather use them only at the primary level. The elementary school I focused on decided to use them for Kindergarten and First Grade for the 1988-1989 school year. They added Second Grade this school year, 1990-1991.

One of the administration's major concerns was how parents would react to the change in report cards. One would automatically think that they would be reluctant. However, according to a study conducted by Fred Page, this is not always the case. When ranking fifteen items from most important to least important, parents ranked grades on report cards ninth. Grades came below behavior in class, cooperation, study skills, and several other social growth items (Page, 1987). From this data, it would seem that parents are more concerned with their child's total growth, than the single grade that they see on a report card. If this is the case, than parents should prefer narrative report cards, since they offer parents a more complete picture of how their child is performing in school.

Obviously, both parents and teachers have vested interests in the reporting system that a school chooses to use. As a student teacher, I became interested in the methods of assessment used at my placement school. I was curious to see if an alternative method of reporting, such as narrative report cards, could be effective and preferred by both teachers and parents. The focus of my study is to gather reactions to and opinions of

narratives from both parents and teachers of the First and Second Grades at the school. To determine this, I surveyed parents of both First and Second graders on their opinions of the current report card form. I also interviewed two teachers from each grade level to obtain their thoughts on the subject. My intent is to prove that both parents and teachers do prefer a narrative reporting system over grades because of the narrative's more personal and less competitive nature.

PROCEDURE

The location of my study is an elementary school in Central Virginia. It serves a suburban community of mostly middle class families. There are some extremes on either end of the spectrum, there is a federally subsidized community and a trailer park in the area, as well as some very large homes. However, I would conclude that on the average the school serves a middle-class suburban community.

For this study, I am mainly concerned with the First and Second Grades at this school. The First Grade is larger than the Second Grade with a total of 128 students in six classrooms with six teachers and six aides. Second Grade has a total of 98 students with four classroom teachers.

There are two parts to the study. The first part consists of a survey that contains nine questions concerning different aspects of evaluation (Appendix C). The survey was sent home with every student in his or her take-home folder. A total of 226 parents were surveyed. Interviews with teachers made up the second part of the study. I chose to interview with two teachers from each grade level. A copy of the interview questions is included (Appendix D). Since Second Grade just switched to narrative reports this year, the interview questions are slightly different for them.

RESULTS

Survey Results:
(Graph results are in Appendix E)

I distributed a total of 226 surveys to the parents and received a total of 73 surveys returned, 48 from First Grade parents and 25 from Second Grade parents. Overall, 78.1% of parents said they liked the narrative report cards, which breaks down to 85.4% of First Grade parents and 64% of Second Grade parents. Parents gave several reasons why they like the narrative report card. The overwhelming majority of parents, 53 out of 65, said narratives were more personal and allowed the teacher to tell them in more detail how their child is performing in school. Several of the parents were happy that narratives avoided grades and comparisons among students, and one parent said narratives build self-esteem in students. The 17.8% of parents who do not like narratives also explained why they were dissatified with it. Out of 28 total responses, 7 parents felt they wanted to know more about specific objectives that their child needed to reach. They were concerned that their child was not learning what he/she needed to learn. Five parents stated that they just preferred grades in general, and another five just felt that the narrative is unclear. One parent made the criticism that narratives are dependent upon teacher quality and need stricter guidelines. Although most parents did like the narrative report card format, those who did not had some clear criticisms.

Contrary to the results above, when asked which evaluation methods they preferred, 79.5% of parents stated that they would like a mixture of grades, narratives, and checklists in their child's report card. None of the parents wanted checklists alone, 15.1% of parents preferred narratives, and only 5.5% of parents said they would like their child to receive only grades. The next set of answers is even more inconsistent. In response to the question, "What level would you like your child to begin receiving grades?" the majority of parents said Second or Third Grade. So, even though they like the narrative report card, a large number of parents still want to see grades on their child's report card.

Out of curiousity, I included on the survey a couple questions about older siblings. First, I asked if the student in First or Second Grades had any older siblings. If they did, then I wanted to know if the older siblings had ever received a narrative. I was interested in knowing if this had any effect on their answers. The results indicate that it does not make any difference. The same number of parents like or disliked the narrative report card whether the older sibling had received them or not.

Interview Results:
(Typed copies of interviews in Appendix F)

I interviewed two teachers from each grade level and received a wide range of answers to my questions. However, there are several ideas that they all share. All four teachers prefer the narrative because they can give the parents more information about their child's progress. Using a narrative allow them to treat each child as an individual. In addition, they all agree that narratives do require extra work, but it is definitely worth it because the narrative benefits the child and the parents.

When asked how they would feel about switching back to grades, the First Grade teachers were very upset because they do not believe grades are appropriate for young children. The Second Grade teachers expressed more disappointment at switching back, and said they would continue to write small narratives (as comments) on their own.

Next, I asked the teachers how they felt about grades in general. Two teachers responded that they oppose all use of grades. The other two teachers said they are only against the use of grades in elementary school. I then asked the teachers why they did not like the use of grades in elementary school. They gave me three reasons: 1. Grades put pressure on students; 2. Grades do not describe the student's progress; and 3. Grades can be arbitrary because they depend upon teacher expectations.

As my final question, I asked teachers for their ideal method of reporting on students. Three of the four teachers said they would stay with the narratives, but were careful to stress the importance of conferencing with parents as well. One teacher said she would prefer to just conference with the parents four times a year, instead of sending the narratives home.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

It is evident in the results that parents and teachers share the same basic goal for reporting on students. A majority of parents and all of the teachers said that they liked the narratives because they are more personal and more informative. Judging from these responses, parents want to receive the most information possible about how their child is doing in school, and teachers want to give parents the most information they can.

Although they agree on this point, parents and teachers have different ideas about how to achieve this goal. During the interviews, the teachers stressed the importance of the narrative report card in allowing them to describe fully each student's progress. They also felt that conferencing with the parents was an important step to fully informing them. Parents took a different stance, though. According to the survey, the largest number of parents would like to see a mixture of grades, checklists, and narratives on their child's report card. They feel that this will tell them the most about their child's progress in school. Thus, parents and teachers have the same goal, but they prefer different methods of evaluation. However, they both agree that narratives are helpful, because they offer an explanation of how and what the child is doing in school.

Parents and teachers also differed in their opinions of when students should begin to receive grades. All of the teachers said grades are inappropriate in elementary school, and two of

the teachers added that they do not like the use of grades at all. Parents had a completely different opinion. The majority of parents wanted their child to begin receiving grades sometime during elementary school. I believe this difference is largely due to parents' familiarity with grades and their general acceptance in society. The importance of grades is everywhere, from Honor Rolls to college admissions. It is not surprising that parents want to know how their child is measuring up.

In addition to the parent/teacher differences, there are some differences between grade levels. The First Grade parents overwhelmingly support narratives, but a much smaller majority of Second Grade parents like the narratives. Furthermore, I asked teachers in interviews how they would feel if they had to return to using grades, and the answers were noticeably different for each grade level. The Second Grade teachers expressed a sense of disappointment at having to switch back, but the First Grade teachers were very upset that I even mentioned the idea. Both First Grade teachers stated they would fight that decision every step of the way.

What explanation is there for these differences? Most likely, these differences are a result of how long each teacher has been using narratives. The First Grade teachers have been using narratives for three years now, and the Second Grade teachers just began using them this year. It is reasonable to conclude that the Second Grade teachers have not been using narratives long enough to become attached to them. It would be

interesting to return to the school in two years and ask the teachers the same question and see if the Second Grade teachers become as upset as the First Grade teachers did. As for the parental differences of opinion, these are also probably due to the newness of Second Grade narratives. Once they become more established, I think parent support will increase.

As I said at the beginning of this report, grades are entrenched in our educational system. Many schools would like to change this, but change is usually resisted and thus difficult to achieve. The teachers at this school did an excellent job of educating and communicating with the parents. Although some differences do still exist, the fact that a majority of the parents do like the narrative report cards for the very same reasons that the teachers do leads me to believe that narrative report cards can be a successful alternative to grades.

APPENDIX A

Alternatives to Traditional Grading:

This is a listing of the various alternatives to grading that I found in my research. I am not advocating any of them, but just including them for your information.

1. Written Evaluation (Narratives)

   The teacher writes about the student's progress. Some school systems use forms to guide the teacher's comments by giving spaces for "strengths" and "areas for improvement". In the written evaluation, the teacher has more opportunity to describe details of the student's education.

2. Self-Evaluation

   The student evaluates his/her own progress, either in writing or in a conference with the teacher. In this system, the student will determine his/her own grade. Usually, the student's grade is combined with or accompanied by the teacher's grade. Many teachers use forms to help students with this process.

3. Give grades but don't tell students

   Students are given grades as usual, but they are not told what the grades actually are. They are informed of their progress through teacher conferences.

4. The Contract System

   This system, when applied to the whole class, means that if the student does a certain type, quantity, and quality of work, the student will receive a given grade. Depending on the teacher, the terms of the contract may be determined by the class as a whole, or just the teacher. The contract system may also be used for individual students in which the student draws up his own contract and the teacher agrees to it.

5. The Mastery Approach (Checklists)

The student is measured according to his/her own progress. When the student reachers a specific objective, the teacher checks it off.

6. Behavior Attitudes Checklists

A series of objectives, both behavioral and cognitive, that the teacher checks off as the child achieves them. Most often used in the primary grades.

7. Pass/Fail Grading

Either the class as a whole, or the teacher, determine the criteria for passing. Any student that meets that criteria will pass the class, any student who does not will fail. Students who are failing will have the opportunity to redo work in order to bring it up to the passing level.

APPENDIX B

Sample Narratives:

1. Sample Narrative Report Card (First Grade uses this as report form)
2. Sample First Grade Conference Form
3. Sample Second Grade Conference/Report Form
4. Sample Narratives written by First Grade teachers

COUNTY NARRATIVE REPORT CARD

Student Name _____
School Year 19__ - 19__

Grade K 1 2 3 4 5
Report 1 2 3 4

_____
Parent Signature
/ / Desires Conference

Copy-Return to School
With Parent/Guardian
Comments on Back

_____
Teacher Signature
/ / Desires Conference

Original-Parent or Guardian

FIRST GRADE CONFERENCE FORM

Student: _____ Teacher: _____ Date: _____

SOCIAL SKILLS/WORK HABITS: _____

_____

_____

_____

WRITING: _____

_____

_____

_____

SPELLING STAGES:

Preliterate Speller
Early Letter Name
Letter Name
Transitional
Syllable Juncture
Derivational

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

READING STAGES:

Emergent
Beginning
Advanced Beginning
Transitional
Intermediate
Proficient

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

MATH/SCIENCE: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Parent Signature: _____

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SECOND GRADE CONFERENCE/REPORT

NAME _____ DATE _____ TIME _____

SPELLING STAGE: ___ Preliterate Prephonetic ___ Early Letter Name
___ Letter Name ___ Transitional ___ Syllable Juncture

_____

_____

_____

WORD STUDY SKILLS: _____

_____

_____

_____

READING STAGE:

___ Emergent: Your child is able to read "Predictable Pattern" books with support. The teacher reads the book to the child, then asks the child to read giving support as necessary.

Your child is able to read books with 95% accuracy.

___ Beginning Readers
___ Advanced Beginning Readers - I Can Read Books
___ Transitional Readers - Easy Chapter Books
___ Chapter Books

_____

_____

_____

WRITING SKILLS: _____

_____

_____

MATH SKILLS: _____

_____

_____

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: _____

_____

_____

TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

PARENT _____ TEACHER _____

Sample Narratives Written By First Grade Teachers:

_____ is enjoying books at school! He often "reads" (by memory) to other children or to Oreo, the guinea pig. This experience is good for _____ because he is talking more, choosing more academic activities, and becominng a storyteller using picture clues and his memory. _____ is doing very well in writing. He uses his alphabet to sound out words now. He is learning to spell many words that he likes to put in his word-bank. I feel _____ greatest skill in school this year is his confidence concerning other children and in reading, writing, and math. _____ is beginning to understand what words are now and is ready to start reading in the first grade book and using class-made books. He will be learning more words and his writing should improve as well. I would like to see _____ begin planning and writing stories soon. His pictures are beautiful in color and detail. _____ is learning to recognize and write numbers in math. He is also measuring, weighing, and estimating. _____ is having a good year due to his many successes in academics and with his classmates. I feel another year in this type of a classroom will help _____ improve his reading, writing, and math as well as be successful in school.

I am pleased to see _____ becoming more comfortable in the school setting. I am beginning to see him approach situations in a more joyful manner. He is willing to reach out to friends more and is happy when they respond as he wishes. He still finds the normal give and take of group life more than he wants to deal with at times, seeming to need to be in control of exactly what will happen to him. He also finds taking responsibility for himself and his belonging difficult because he can become diverted so easily.

I am trying to help him become more flexible by presenting activities which bring success quickly, and by helping him to express his thoughts and to listen to his friends ideas. I am also encouraging him to "try again". This is particularly true in physical activities because he gives up easily here.

In Math Their Way, _____ has worked on counting, graphing, estimating, sorting, classifying, beginning patterning and simple number stories. I will continue to work on all of these as well as some comparing activities.

Math Their Way, language arts, science,, health and social studies are integrated at this level. _____ has been an interested and participating pupil. He enjoys stories and understands their parts. He sometimes wants to write about his own in our class project. Often he will prefer a "hands on" activity to a "sit down " one, and he thoroughly enjoys imaginative play and dramatization. To encourage cooperation I sometimes pair him with another or place him with a group.

Academically, _____ can do quite well in all areas. Being distracted by other people and activities, having difficulty following directions and staying on task present problems for him. Helping _____ to focus, having him retell directions, and praising him for progress have been helpful.

Sometimes _____ avoids change and new experiences. In these areas I try to be as supportive as possible by such things as giving him choices, recognizing growth and learning and providing a "safe" enviroment for risk taking.

Thanks for being so supportive and interested. I care very much for _____- he is a great source of pleasure!

_____ continues to work appropriately with his classmates, and when we play a game that has teams, he is usually one of the first students chosen by his classmates. He seems to prefer the block area of our room to work in daily, as this is usually his first place to go. At our centers during free choice time, he is able to play cooperatively with others as well as work independently or amuse himself. _____ interacts with materials in a thoughtful and careful way, and attempts to follow school rules, rarely needing reminders.

_____ prereading skills are good, he is interested in books, and he seems to already know quite a bit about the way print works on a page. He looks at books from left to right in an upright position, and if it is a familiar story, he can retell story events in sequence. Thanks for your support from home in providing a literate environment for him. Through your interactions with him with literature, he has learned from you to love books, to recognize print, and he has a great sense of story. _____ pays attention to details, and is extremely observant! He matches words with the same beginning letters, and discriminates differences he hears in words.

_____ contributions to our unit activities continue to be insightful and thought-provoking for other students. He seems to enjoy learning about our topics, as he sometimes asks questions that indicate he is not only listening, but also thinking about our weekly topics. Thanks for all your help at home in extending his unit learning by helping him find items for Unit Share. He is so proud when he has something to share that usually he shares it with me before school because he can't contain his excitement. We have sharing time at different times of the day - if you're going into work late one morning, or coming home early, please let me know and I'll schedule it that day at a time convenient to you so you could watch. _____ would love to share his success with you and have you watch him!

_____ interactions with our hand-on math materials continue to be appropriate, and he continues to grow in patterning skills, counting, and sorting and classifying. Please ask him to explain "junkboxes" to you and tell you what we do with them.

Thanks for your support from home and for the help you give _____ to be prepared for school. Parents like you who work closely with the school have children who are more successful in school!

APPENDIX C

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Last fall, I student taught in first grade class. This semester, I am conducting a research project for the Curry School of Education. This project concerns the type of report card used in the First and Second grades. I am interested in learning your feelings about this and would appreciate it greatly if you would please complete the following survey and return it to school with your child in his/her take-home folder.

Thank You,

Kristy Hall

1. What grade is your child in? 1st ____ 2nd ____
2. Does your 1st or 2nd grader have any older siblings? yes ____ no ____
3. If so, has the older sibling ever received narrative report cards? yes ____ no ____
4. Are you satisfied with the form of your child's report card? yes ____ no ____
5. Please respond to one of the questions below.
   A. If you do like the narrative report card, what is it that you like about it?

   B. If you do not like the narrative report card, could you explain why not?

6. Would you like to see a checklist of grade level objectives your child should meet by the end of the year? yes ____ no ____
7. Which type of evaluation do you prefer for this grade level?

   Grades _____ Checklists _____ Narratives _____

   a mix of the above _____
8. At what grade level would you like your child to start receiving grades?
9. Do you have any suggestions for the report cards or the grading procedures?

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions (1st Grade)

1. What do you like best about your present method of reporting?

2. Do you feel narratives require extra work, as compared to other evaluation methods? Does this bother you at all?

3. If, for some reason, the school decided to switch back to grades, do you think it would affect how you had to teach? Would this affect your job satisfaction?

4. Do you oppose grades? If so, do you feel they are appropriate at any level? Which level?

5. Ideally, how would you report on students? Which method do you think is most appropriate?

Interview Questions (2nd Grade)

1. What do you like best about your present method of reporting?

2. As compared to last year, do you feel that the use of narratives now requires extra work?

3. If, for some reason, the school decided to switch back to grades, how would you feel about it? Has the switch to narratives affected your teaching and assessing methods?

4. Do you oppose grades? If so, at which level do you oppose them? Where do you feel grades are most appropriate?

5. Ideally, how would you report on students? Which method do you think is most appropriate?

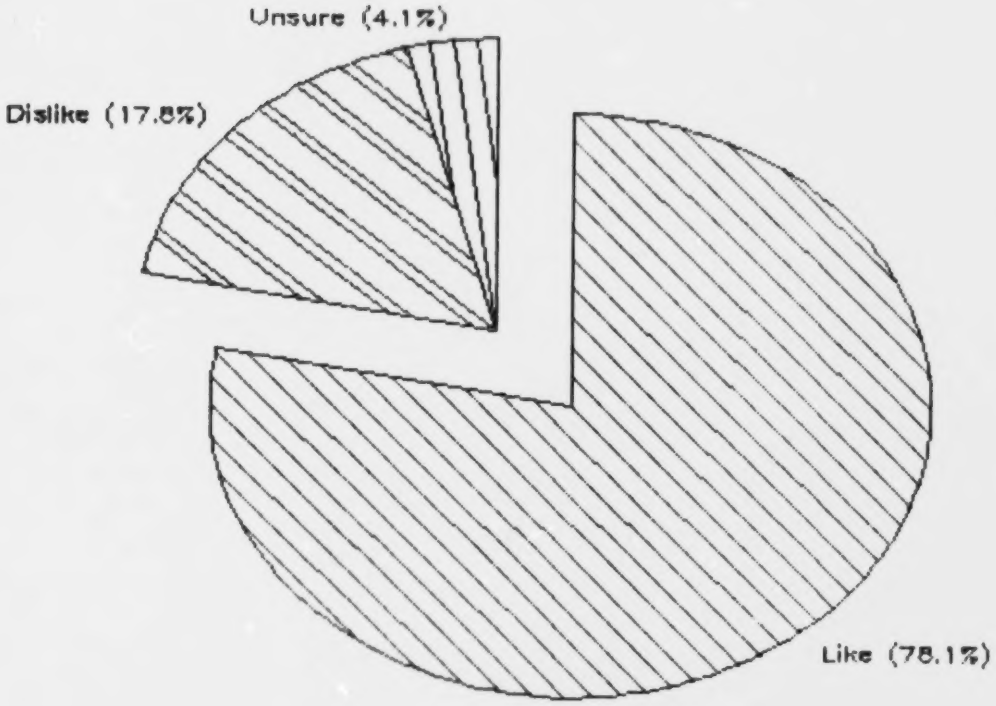
APPENDIX E

Graphs of Survey Results:

1. Parents' Opinions of Narratives (Overall)
2. Parents' Opinions of Narratives (First Grade)
3. Parents' Opinions of Narratives (Second Grade)
4. Evaluation Methods Preferred by Parents
5. Mixture Breakdown
6. Reasons Parents Favor Narratives
7. Reasons Parents Don't Favor Narratives
8. Level Parents Prefer Child To Begin Receiving Grades

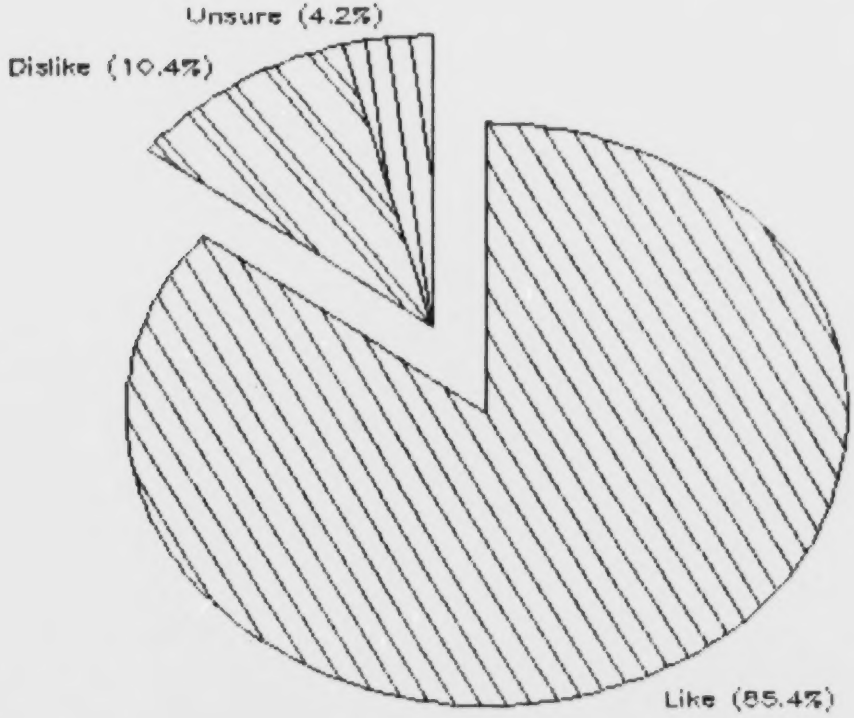
Parents' Opinion of Narratives

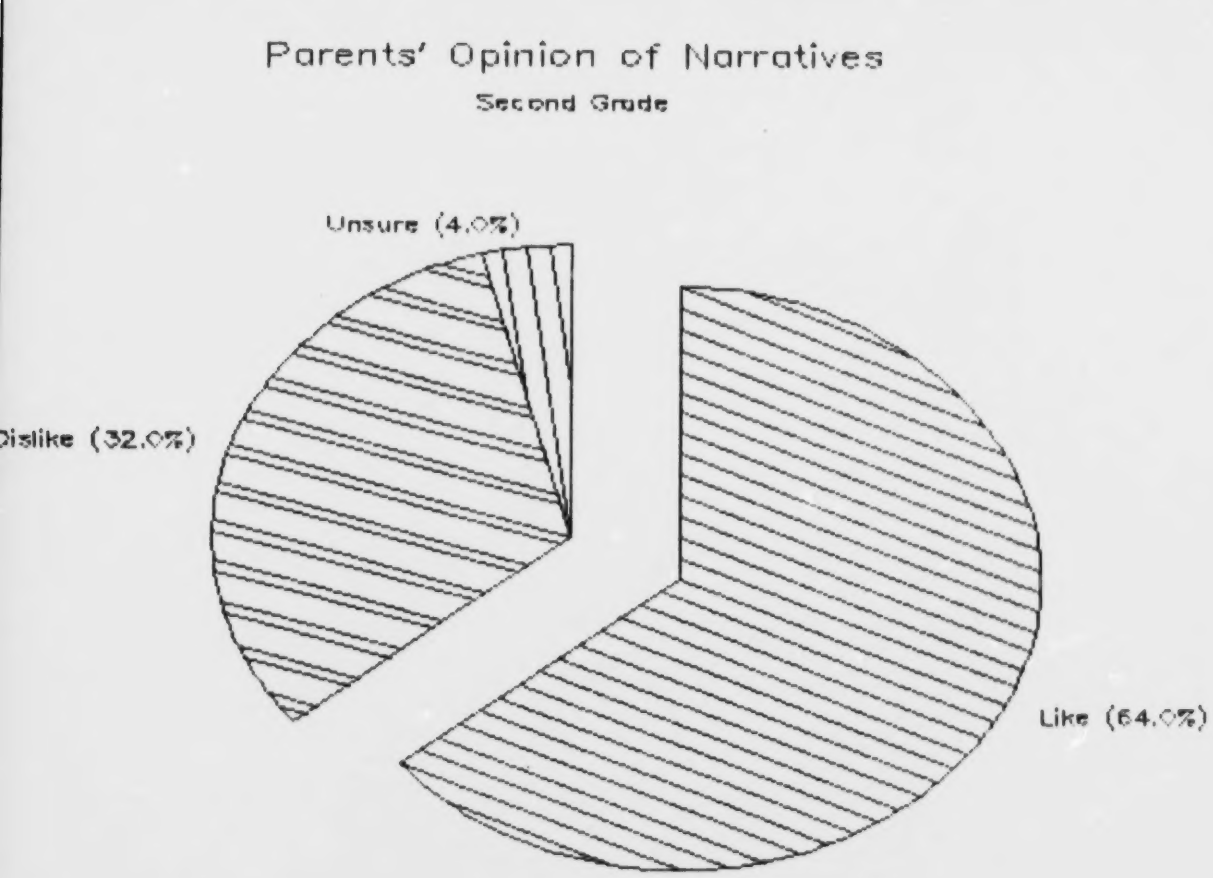
Overall



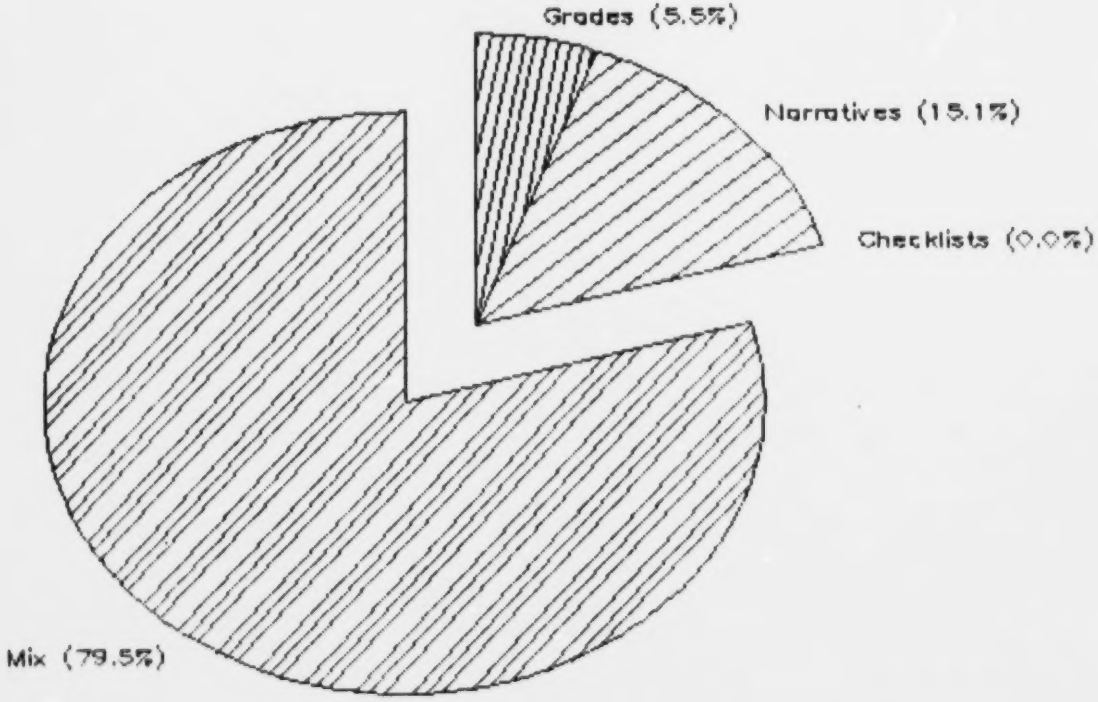
Parents' Opinion of Narratives

First Grade

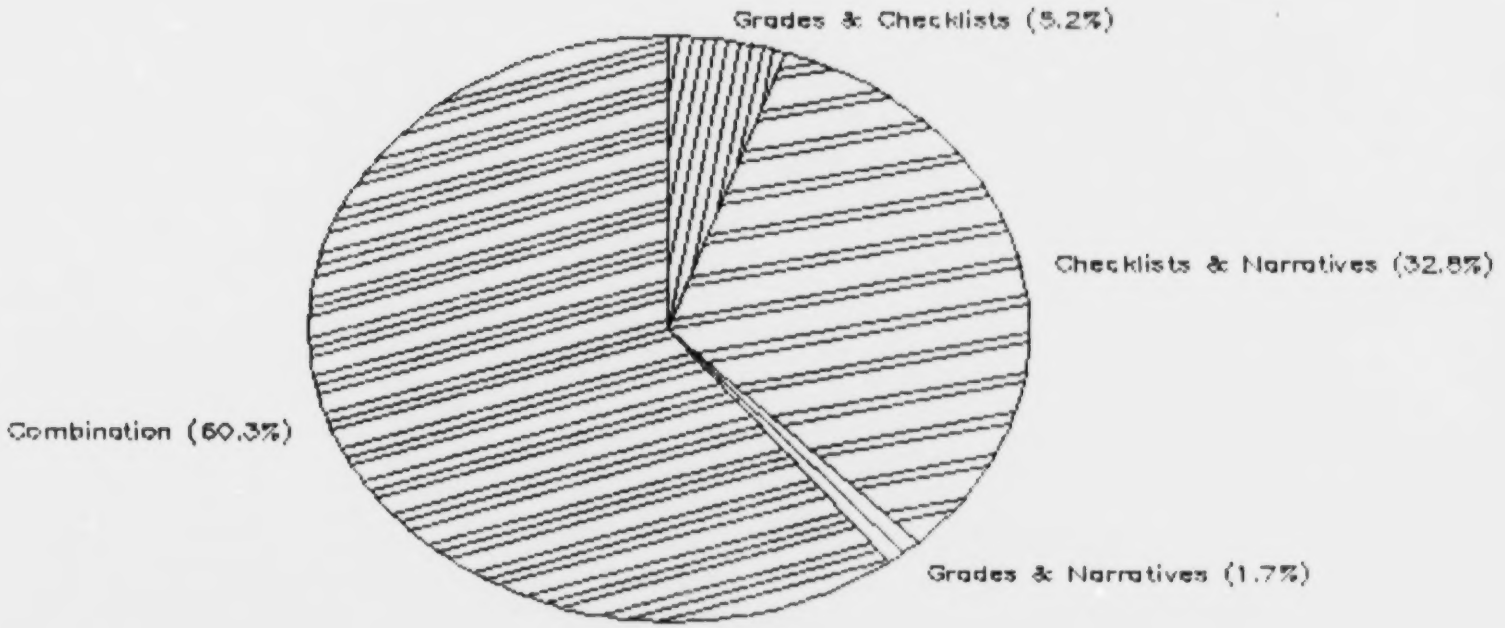


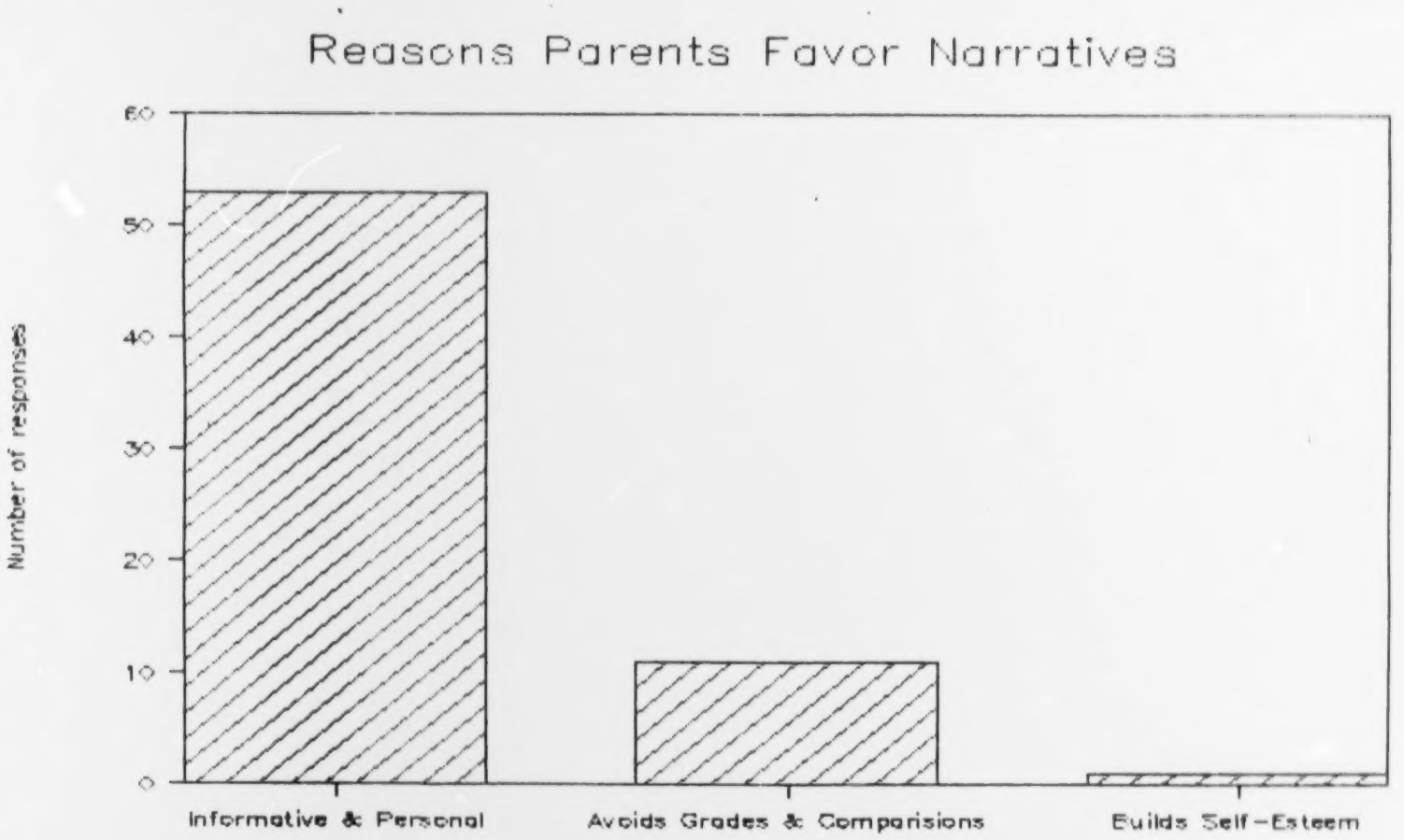

Parents' Opinion of Narratives
Second Grade
Unsure (4.0%)
Dislike (32.0%)
Like (64.0%)

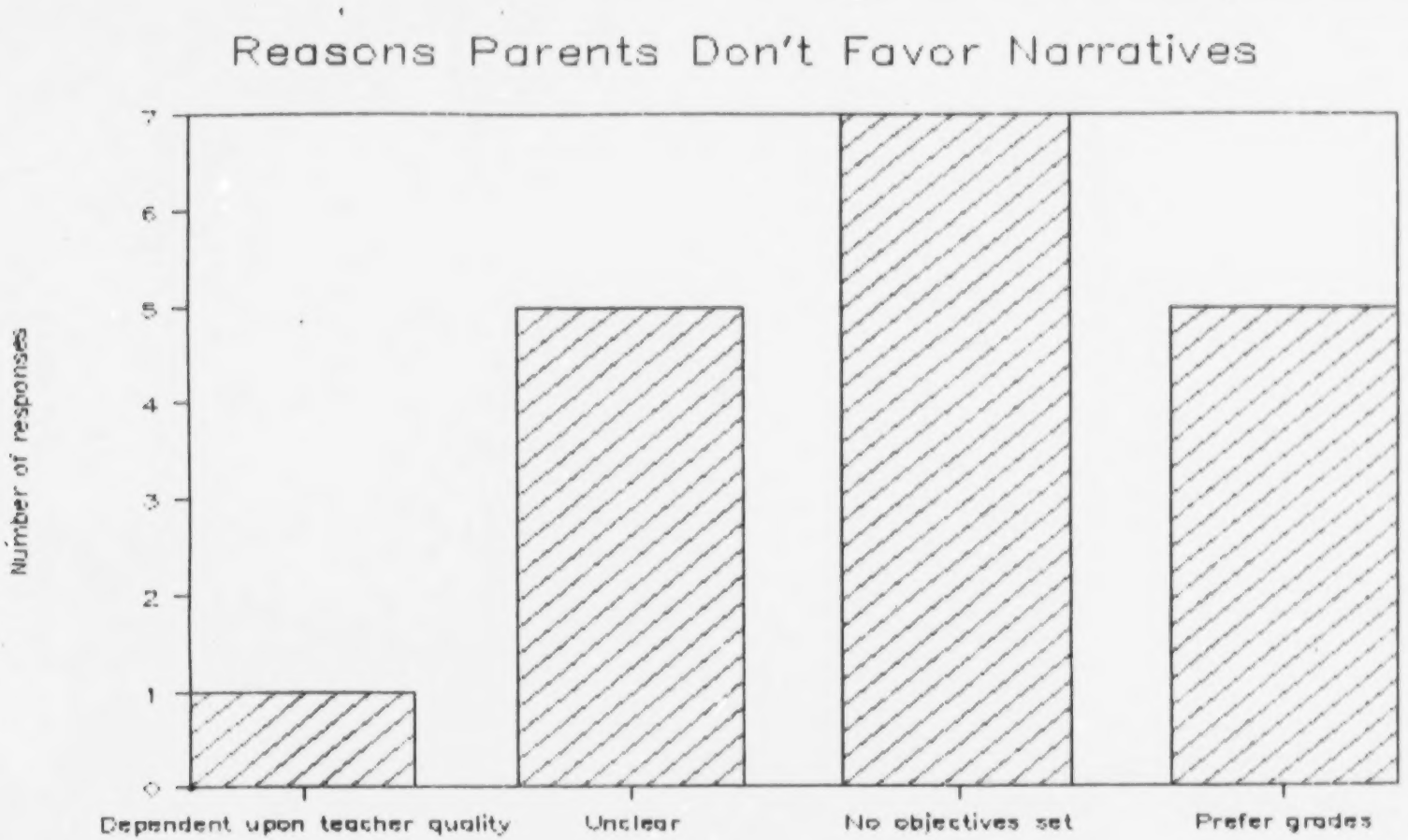
Evaluation Methods Preferred by Parents

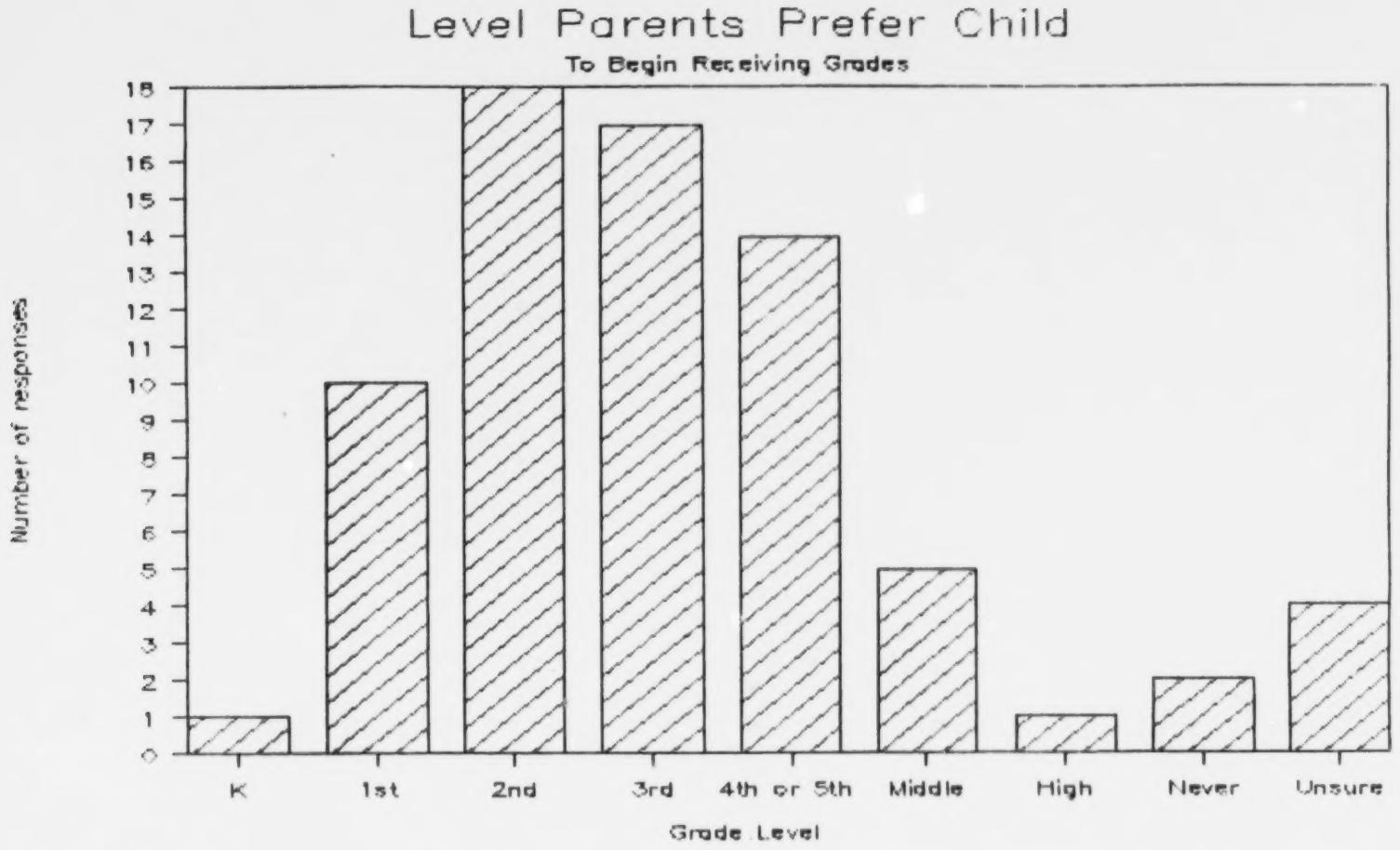


Mixture Breakdown




Reasons Parents Favor Narratives
Number of responses
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Informative & Personal
Avoids Grades & Comparisions
Builds Self-Esteem


Reasons Parents Don't Favor Narratives
Number of responses
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
Dependent upon teacher quality
Unclear
No objectives set
Prefer grades


Level Parents Prefer Child
To Begin Receiving Grades
Number of responses
18
17
16
15
14
13
12
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
K
1st
2nd
3rd
4th or 5th
Middle
High
Never
Unsure
Grade Level

APPENDIX F

Typed Copies of Interviews:

1. Interview with First Grade teacher (A)
2. Interview with First Grade teacher (B)
3. Interview with Second Grade teacher (A)
4. Interview with Second Grade teacher (B)

INTERVIEW WITH FIRST GRADE TEACHER (A) March 22, 1991

I: What do you like best about your present method of reporting?

1A: I like the parent-teacher conferences. I like being able to explain things to parents face-to-face when they can ask questions. It's sometimes hard to write things down, you can't get across to the parent a clear explanation. If you see them and they don't understand it, they can ask you questions. So I think that's my favorite thing.

I: When you use narratives, as opposed to another method, do you think that they require extra work or do you think it all evens out?

1A: I really think it all evens out because when you do any kind of reporting to parents you have to do the assessing. You do it weekly, but still I use the packet and four times a year I try to update each of the different items, so I can make a comparison and really show the parents the growth and it takes a lot of time to write a narrative, but you're doing the same kind of assessment, and when you try to schedule a conference it takes time so it really I think balances out.

I: If for some reason they would decide to switch back to grades, do you think it would have an effect on how you teach?

1A: I would fight it, I would really fight it.

I: Would it affect your job satisfaction? Would you be really unhappy?

1A: Yes, I would be very unhappy if we had to. I don't think, and parents have been writing back in your surveys, and I agree with them, I don't think you need to compare one child to another at this age, there's enough pressure for grades put on later on when they start publishing honor rolls in middle school. It's hard for the kids. I don't know how to give grades, I would have to really think about it and I haven't, but I would really have to think about how to grade papers and it would be very difficult and like I said, I wouldn't like it.

I: As far as grades go, do you oppose them, or do you think they are useful at some level? At which level do you think they are most useful?

1A: I would like to see them start in middle school. I oppose the publication of honor rolls and putting stuff in newspapers. I think it makes it hard on children, because not every child is an A/B student, and some children all they can do is a C and its the best they can do and they're

putting forth a lot of effort to get that C, and I think that's okay. I don't think they should be made to feel like a failure just because they're getting C's.

I: If it was up to you, ideally, how would you assess students and evaluate them? This method or do you have other ideas?

1A: It's really hard for me to say, because I have been in Kindergarten for so many years and I really like the assessment packet that we have now. There are some parts I have some questions about, but for the most part I like it. I think it gives you a fair assessment, I think it gives you a good method of letting the parents see growth. Like in September when we give the children the spelling check, the list of spelling words, they can see, Oh they're writing beginning sounds and next time they're adding those ending sounds and maybe a few short vowels, and by the end of the year, they can see you have been doing something with these children, because you can see the growth. So, I do like the assessment packet, because even before we had the formal assessment, we came up with our own assessment, so I think this is good.

INTERVIEW WITH FIRST GRADE TEACHER (B) April 19, 1991

I: What do you like best about using narratives?

1B: I like narratives best because I can write what's appropriate for that child. All children are so different, there's no way I could give them grades because I would have to compare them and there's no way to compare them. Narratives allow me to compare them to themselves, to what they used to do and what they're doing now, and what I hope they'll be doing. It's very individual and that's what I like best about them.

I: Do you feel narratives require extra work? Does this bother you at all, is it worth it?

1B: I've only given grades two years that I've been teaching and it was easier to give grades because all you had to do was to give worksheets and tests and then grades back. But, I didn't know the kids very well and there were still kids that weren't learning. I think it's more work to do a narrative, but I think it's worth it. The way I teach dictates that I have to do a narrative report, because I am giving narratives that means that I am teaching differently than I was when I was giving grades. What I am doing in the classroom is more appropriate, but it does require a lot more work. I have to figure out on my own what kind of record keeping I need to do. Just to write a narrative takes a lot more time and I have to refer back to all the notes that I've kept on that child, but I think it's more valuable.

I: If, for some reason, the school decided to switch back to grades, do you think it would affect how you had to teach? Would it affect your job satisfaction?

1B: I wouldn't teach. I would really have to seriously consider teaching in this county if I had to switch back to grades, because it's just not appropriate for young kids. If I had to switch back to grades and if I had to stay here and I couldn't leave, what I would probably do is what I did my first year of teaching. I would still teach the way I thought I should be teaching, but I would throw in a couple objective things that the kids had to do, worksheets, tests, whatever, just so I could put a grade down. That wouldn't be satisfying to me. I would really have to consider what I would do if they switched back to grades. That's a horrible thing to think of.

I: In general, not just in 1st grade, but in general, do you oppose grades?

1B: I've only taught 1st grade, but I am opposed to grades I would have to say. If you're giving grades, then that means

that you are doing a certain thing. When you give grades, you are teaching so that the kids only learn certain things. It's very narrow. I don't think they are learning strategies, they're not learning how to learn. I think there's a big part of learning that's being missed when kids are given very closed-ended tasks. If you think about when you graduate from college and you're looking for a job, grades really don't mean a whole lot at that point. Now, what you need is a portfolio showing what you can actually do. Grades don't really show what you can actually do, grades show how well you hold up under the pressure of taking a test, how well you memorize something.

I: Ideally, how would you report on students?

1B: I would prefer not to do the narratives, I would prefer to get the parents in four times a year to conference with them, but it would still be a narrative-type report. I would be talking with the parents about their child, and what I've seen, what I am seeing, and how I am going to help their child get to the next step. That's ideal for me, to get the parents in four times a year, and that way I learn more about the child from them, too. They tell me things that really surprise me, that I never would have guessed.

I: Is it hard to get them all in here?

1B: There's one parent that I haven't gotten in yet. Sometimes it's hard to get them in. I've had to reschedule a few, but they eventually get in.

INTERVIEW WITH SECOND GRADE TEACHER (A) April 8, 1991

I: Do you like using the narratives?

2A: I do. I think it's more thorough. It gives a better description of where the child is working at, rather than just giving an A, B, or C; and it's more positive, too.

I: Since you just switched to narratives this year, do you see any difference in how much you've had to do, as related to last year, or do you think its just different?

2A: I think it takes a lot more work, I mean it takes more time in wording things. Its easier to average out a grade or that kind of thing. In the past, its taken me maybe a half an hour to do report cards. Now it takes 45-50 minutes to do one, so it takes longer. There are pieces of certain areas, such as spelling groups and that kind of thing that you can use on different children's reports, so wording comes easier as you've done 5, 6, 7, 8 of them.

I: Since it takes more time, does it bother you at all? Do you think it's worth it?

2A: I think it's worth it. It's worth the time, as long as it's what the parents appreciate. If there are some parents who think it is bad or don't understand it than it's not worth the time. I guess that just means that we need to educate the parents about what we are doing to make sure they understand.

I: If, after doing this for almost a year now, they decided to switch back, would it bother you?

2A: Well, it would in a sense. I would never want to go just totally back. If I have to put down an A, B, or C, I would also want to have to describe why I am doing that. I think its more worthwhile to the child.

I: How do you feel about grades in general?

2A: I was going to say that grades are okay, but its hard, because what I might give as an A or a B might be a B or a C in a different class. A child might be bringing home all A's, but if you're in a different class, under different circumstances and teacher expectations, the type of grader she might be, it would be different. I think it's in a sense kind of arbitrary on whatever you are doing, not every test is a fill-in-the-dot or a 2 + 2 where there is a definite answer. What one teacher might expect as excellent work, might just be an average to another teacher. A child might be doing okay, a C is okay, but they might be expecting a child to do higher or be superior.

I: Do you think narratives help that?

2A: I think so, because it's not saying, well my child got five A's and is doing well in school. You just tell the parents they are doing well and what they are doing. How are they doing well? Are they writing stories that are in sequential order? Have you worked on punctuation? Are they understanding that, and can they differentiate between an statement and a question? or reading level: Are they still reading short vowel words and have not built a sight word vocabulary, or are they starting to take off in reading, are they applying and using context clues as ways to figure out words that you've talked about and using that?

I: At what point do you think grades are appropriate, if they are at all?

2A: I don't know. You go to the top of the system - college. Would a college really look when high school students are applying? I would think they would need some kind of a checklist at least, and then you go to test scores and SAT's, that kind of thing. But, I think grades aren't needed at the elementary school level. Maybe, if I had to pick a time, maybe sixth grade, but that's just me not knowing, would narratives work in high school? The way they divide up classes, there is no way that one teacher could write 100 narratives. You could computerize it, but that's just an idea.

I: When you switched to narratives, did you notice any difference in your teaching methods or when you were assessing students?

2A: Not really. I keep more samples now of the student's work, but I don't know if that's just because of experience. This is my fourth year of teaching and I've learned more, I've learned to keep more samples. It helps me. I keep more as a back-up to pull out for a parent who doesn't understand what I mean when I say their child is a letter-name speller, then I can explain to them that the child is using the sounds of letters to spell things out.

I: If it was up to you, how would you report on students?

2A: Well, I don't know if you've seen our narratives, have you gotten a copy of it?

I: I've seen first grade's.

2A: Ours is different and I can give you a copy. It isn't just a blank page. It breaks it up, if anything I would like it just to have some more space. We're going to plan to change it anyway, because the word study and spelling, that kind of goes together and we really don't have any space for unit study. I would love to be able to put down the child's

interests and what they learned in a particular unit. So, for next year, we are going to be changing this form, but I really like it. It would be nice to have a checklist, as well. We kind of combined that with the spelling stages and the reading stages. That might be changed some too. I can see parents saying, just like with letter grades, parents are going to think that an early letter-name is a C, and syllable juncture is an A. Same thing with the reading stages, chapter books are A readers. That's not the way we are grading.

I: So this goes home with the student and then when the parents come in for a conference you just take this out and talk to them about it.

2A: Right. We felt like we wanted some consistency. It help me to think of what to right about, make sure I get everything in. I know that what I am writing about, the other teachers are covering the exact same areas. It's a lot easier to sit down with 24 of these, than just blank pages, cause you feel like you have somewhere to start.

INTERVIEW WITH SECOND GRADE TEACHER (B) April 8, 1991

I: Do you like using narratives?

2B: Yes, because I think they treat each student as an individual and it approaches it in such a way that we can actually give more informative feedback to the parent and the students.

I: As compared to last year, when you sit down to do your narratives now, do you feel that it requires more work than it did last year?

2B: Oh, definitely. It requires more work, there's more thinking, reflective thinking going on. You're not just giving a letter grade, but you're giving actual statements about what you're seeing in the classroom and what's going on with the student developmentally.

I: How do you feel about doing more work, do you think it's worth it?

2B: Yes, I definitely think that it's worth it for the parents and the students. It also helps me to reflect on what I am doing with that child or where I want to go with that child. I think it makes me spend more time devoting to my teaching.

I: If for some reason, after using this for almost a year now, they decided to switch back, how would you feel about that?

2B: I think I would be disappointed, I know I would. I would continue probably to write up things on my own to give the parents some information. Although, I think that I keep my parents pretty informed anyway.

I: When you did switch this year, have you noticed any difference in how you've been assessing them all along, or your teaching methods. Have you noticed that using narratives has changed anything?

2B: No, I think that I've always tried to look at each child individually. Although I have been using more of the childhood assesment packet which I think is wonderful in helping us to keep a portfolio of their progress. So, in that respect, I'm doing more of that than I did last year.

I: How do you feel about grades in general?

2B: Dr. Cannady at the University does an excellent presentation on grades, and it's just wonderful. I think grades in general can be bad for students, depending how the teacher approaches it. I'd like to see them do away with grades all together. There's some University that does that.

I: If they are used, where do you think that they are most appropriate, at which level?

2B: I'd like to see them do away with them in high school.

I: If it was just up to you, ideally, how would you report on students?

2B: I would definitely use the narrative, definitely stay with what I am doing. When we changed in the fall, I was kind of concerned how the parents would respond to it. I didn't feel that we had the parents input into it. We hadn't asked them exactly what they thought of it and I think it's always important to listen to what they say. We've had a positive response to what we are doing, and your surveys have been real interesting to read. At my conferences in the fall, I had maybe three parents who were concerned about it, and I thought after talking about it with them, when they left here they felt pretty good about what we were doing.

I: So you haven't had any negative response, except for those three.

2B: No, and I was a little nervous about it.

I: It's a big change.

2B: It's different for parents. It worked out well. Sometimes they think that if they can get that A, than their child is doing great.

I: But, if they don't get that A.

2B: The child is a total failure. You wonder is it excellent, or what? It doesn't tell you a whole lot. It depends on how that teacher is grading. I think being able to sit down with the parents and go through the portfolios and through the papers that you have and show how they're progressing is the best way to go.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

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